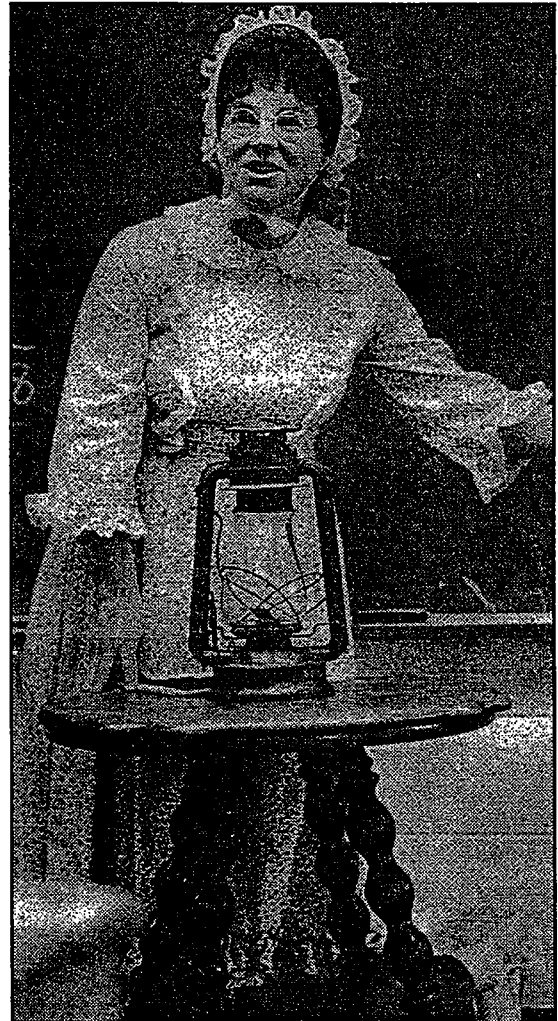




CHAPTER 6

Interpretation

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*Ponderosa State Park
Interpreter Joan Lee, giving
an interpretive program at a
local school.*

Interpretation at Ponderosa State Park

by Larry Mink

Introduction

Interpretive programs and facilities aim to stimulate the visitors interest and curiosity in the parks natural and historical resources so that they will have a meaningful and enjoyable experience. As one interpreter aptly stated, "through Interpretation comes understanding, through understanding comes appreciation, through appreciation comes protection". Visitors to Ponderosa State Park should have a wide range of interpretive facilities and programs to participate in. These programs often set apart state park facilities from other recreational facilities in the area.

Ponderosa State Park, classified as a natural park, has a tremendous variety of interpretive resources, a variety of park visitors, and the potential for a high quality and active interpretive program.

The interpretive section will identify current interpretive programs, facilities and interpretive themes; and suggest a variety of facilities and programs to implement a more successful interpretive program at Ponderosa State Park in the future.

Existing Interpretive Facilities

In the short term, the existing, "all purpose" visitor center will continue to be the major interpretive facility within the park. The visitor center currently has a small interpretive

display on the succession from pond to forest; a small panel on the ponderosa pine; a geology display, four colorful banners, a plant herbarium with common flowers and mounting of a horned owl and osprey. The visitor center also displays and sells numerous books through the Ponderosa Natural History Association.

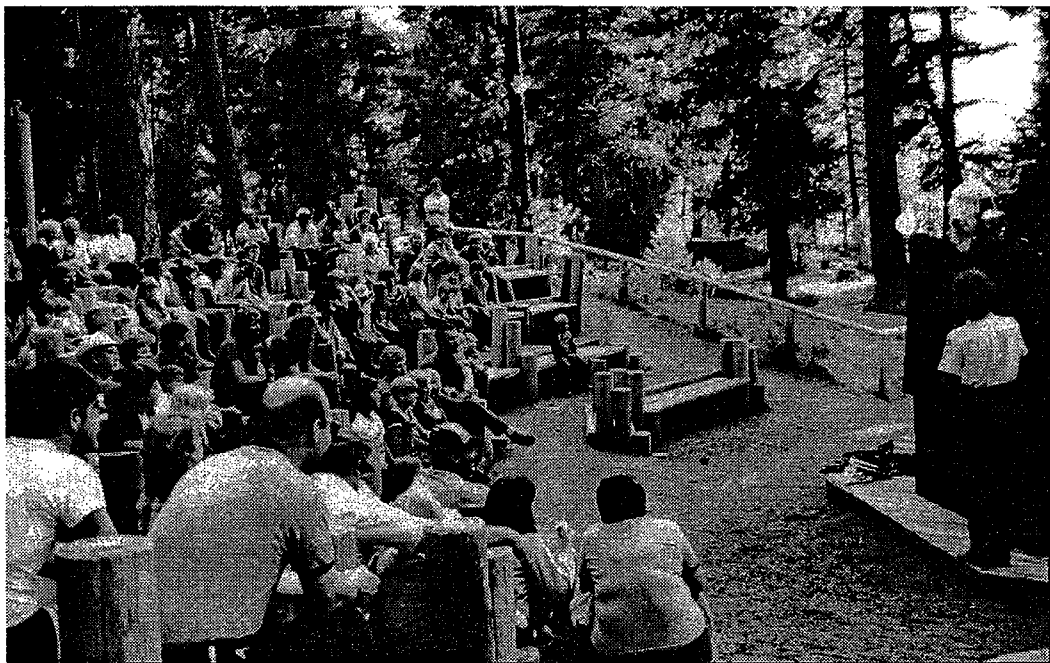
The existing outdoor program area is currently the only other major interpretive facility. The program area, located behind campsite #16 in the campground Aspen Loop will accommodate approximately 100 visitors.

Personal Interpretive Programming

Existing personal interpretive programs consist of outdoor campfire programs on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings; guided interpretive walks twice a week; a Junior Ranger Program offered twice per week; numerous environmental education school group visits to the park, as well as numerous off-site school group visits; and many programs to various groups such as family camps, church groups, community groups, etc. These personal interpretive services are accomplished by one five-month interpretive seasonal, a part-time interpretive aide, and occasionally by the full time staff members.

Non-Personal Interpretive Services

The current services include: information disseminated at bulletin boards throughout the park; three interpretive sign panels at The Point and one at the Lily Marsh bridge; a trail



Existing outdoor amphitheater adjacent to campground.

brochure for the meadow marsh trail; several miles of hiking and biking trails throughout the park; the visitor center exhibits; and general information given out at the visitor center.

Presently, there are no interpretive programs of any kind at the North Beach Unit of the park.

Program Analysis

Considering its meager interpretive budget and insufficient staff the park is providing an optimum amount of services. The strengths of the current program lie with its dedicated staff and the personal interpretive services they offer. The main weaknesses of the interpretive program are lack of interpretive staff; lack of budget; lack of indoor exhibit space; lack of interpretive signing throughout the park; lack of an interpretive plan; and lack of in-

terpretive facilities such as an interpretive center, modern program area, and indoor classroom space for year-round programming.

INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Major Themes

Three major themes have been identified for inclusion in the parks interpretive program:

1. The diversity of the natural ecosystems within the park;

The variety of natural systems in the park such as forests, ponds, Payette Lake, and the geologic history that makes Ponderosa a unique natural site in Idaho. These attributes need to be adequately interpreted to the visiting public;

2. The process of natural suc-

cession from pond, to meadow, to forest;

Two ponds which are in various successional states have been identified by the University of Idaho as the best examples of such in the Pacific Northwest. Lily Marsh and Meadow Marsh are two major natural features within the park that should be interpreted in various ways;

3. The geological processes that shaped the land from volcanism to glaciation;

The park boasts significant geological formations which are easily visible to visitors. These features should be interpreted by various methods.

Secondary Themes

1. Exploration of tree growth, competition, and forest succession;

2. Ecological cycles and change as evidenced in the forest community;

3. Existence of island or remnant populations as a result of natural and human events;

4. Natural wildlife populations, identification, purpose in the ecosystem, and future of the species;

5. Wildflower identification and historic and current uses of the plant;

6. Aquatic habitats and their relationship to the other park environments.

PROPOSED INTERPRETIVE FACILITIES

In order to better interpret Ponderosa State Park, the following interpretive facilities are proposed:

Park Interpretive Center

An addition to the current visitor center - a new facility - is needed to house interpretive displays, exhibits, and maps of the area. This will help visitors understand the natural significance of the park and how to best enjoy the resources present. This facility needs to be large enough to provide space for audio-visual programs



Pedestrian bridge over north end of Lily Marsh.

and /or classroom space for group interpretive programs; exhibit space; room to sell books, postcards, and t-shirts; office space for the interpretive staff; and adequate storage for interpretive equipment and materials. The interpretive center will serve as the park visitors major introduction to the park and act as the hub for the parks interpretive activities.

Outdoor Program Area

The present program area needs to be relocated-away from the noise and distraction of the lakes activities. The new facility should include: a rear-screen projection booth; a stage; better lighting on access trails; improved lighting at the program area; an improved sound system; better handicapped accessibility to the program area; and additional seating capacity and parking for large groups. This facility is the focal point for summer interpretive activities and is therefore a crucial component of the parks interpretive system.

Interpretive Trails

A handicapped accessible trail should be made available. One of the existing trail loops should be modified to meet ADA requirements.

The current trails in the park, should be properly interpreted with high quality signing and/or have a self-guided trail brochure available.

Since hiking trails are a popular activity, a self-guided trail around the perimeter of the entire peninsula is proposed.

The northern two thirds of the park is still relatively undisturbed. This area of the park should be left free of further development and used as the major outdoor interpretive area.

The Nazarene Church Camp

Should the Nazarene Church Camp become a part of Ponderosa State Park, it could be a valuable interpretive facility. The camp could be used as an environmental education facility/group camp for public use. It should not compete with other surrounding camps such as the U of I Forestry Camp and should not put an undue strain on the parks existing staff. Viable alternatives for the use of the camp should be considered.

North Beach Unit

Two interpretive facilities are proposed at the North Beach Unit of the park: an Interpretive "River Trail" along the North Fork of the Payette River, and the "Northwest Passage" historical site. The "River Trail", which passes through one of the most beautiful and natural settings of either park unit, will provide interpretive stops with signing along the river bank for the canoe visitor. The "Northwest Passage" interpretive site will convey to passers-by the sites historical use as the "set" for the film "Northwest Passage".

PROPOSED ADDITIONAL PROGRAMMING

In order to better interpret Ponderosa State Park, the following interpretive activities are proposed in addition to the existing programs:

Proposed On-Site Activities

With the ever - increasing attendance during the summer months, it is proposed to offer campfire programs seven nights per week, add additional interpretive walks and longer hikes, add additional children's programs to the schedule such as Junior Ranger Programs, and schedule other activities that may not fit the traditional mold of interpretive programs; horse-shoe contests, volleyball tournaments, and bicycle tours.

The winter ski program at Ponderosa is continually growing and interpretive programming for this audience needs to be seriously considered. Guided ski tours, during day and evening hours, are recommended. Also, programs in the visitor center during the day interpreting the winter landscape would be ideal for tired skiers or family members resting and warming up.

Environmental Education Programs

On-site school group program demand is ever increasing. To teach our children sound environmental values is very important. Ponderosa State Park should be a premiere outdoor classroom for all people to enjoy and

learn from. This plan encourages scheduling school groups throughout the entire school year for outdoor/environmental education classes.

Special Events

With the assistance of the Ponderosa Natural History Association, the park is encouraged to sponsor numerous special events within the park. These events could include mountain man rendezvous, community musicfest and other educational events.

Proposed Off-Site Activities

Ponderosa State Park should continue and expand its off-site environmental education programs to central Idaho schools. Past programs on recycling and history have been very successful and should continue to be popular in the future. Off-site programs by park staff not only educate our children - they also give the park a positive educational image. A planned, on - going educational program in cooperation with the area schools, should be a major interpretive element. The park staff is encouraged to present other off-site programs to community groups, civic organizations, and other educational institutions.

INTERPRETIVE SUPPORT

In order to conduct the proposed interpretive program, additional support is needed from a full time interpretive staff position, volunteers, the Association, and additional resource materials.

To plan, coordinate, and implement the many facets of the parks interpretive program, consideration should be given to hiring a full time interpretive staff position. Additional seasonal interpretive aides are also recommended.

Volunteers, and teachers can provide tremendous support for a wide variety of programs.

Effective interpretive programs require a well - trained staff. On-going formalized training is recommended to insure the highest quality interpreters are presenting accurate information.

An active interpretive program requires readily available information in the form of books, magazines, resource materials, audio-visual materials, photographs, etc. The park is encourage to assemble an interpretive resource center in the park.

The Ponderosa Natural History Association is a recognized non-profit cooperating association that provides educational and interpretive resources to the park. This association should continue to support the efforts of the parks interpretive programs through the sale of items in the visitor center, fund raising programs, and seeking grants and other outside funding for support of the interpretive program.

Interpretive Priorities

1. Interpretive center expansion or construction of a new facility for exhibits, displays, audio-visual/classroom, offices, and storage.

2. Additional staff to implement

a complete interpretive program.

3. "Interpretive River Trail" development along the North Fork at North Beach Unit.

4. Outdoor Program Area relocation and improvements.

5. Upgrade interpretive signing on the existing trails and addition of a trail around the perimeter of the park peninsula.

6. Additional environmental education programs both on and off-site.

7. Expansion of the summer interpretive program to serve more visitors.

8. Winter interpretive programs for the ski visitor.

9. Construction of the "Northwest Passage" interpretive site on Warren Wagon Road - North Beach Unit.

The Ponderosa Natural History Association

The Ponderosa Natural History Association is an integral part of the current interpretive program at the park. The Association assists the park interpretive program financially through the sale of books, postcards, and t-shirts. The Association consists of volunteers who support the park and assist with special events. The Association has funded things such as audio-visual equipment, resource materials, and visitor center exhibits in the past. The Association will play an essential part in the parks interpretive programs in the future.

N.F. PAYETTE RIVER INTERPRETIVE TRAIL

Background

During the planning process, two facts became evident: boaters love the tranquil experience found on the stretch of the North Fork that meanders through the North Beach Unit; and its wetland ecosystem offers a fantastic interpretive opportunity. A typical interpretive foot-trail would "invade" this sensitive riparian environment, and would lead ultimately to resource degradation; if an interpretation program was to be pursued, a creative solution would be required.

Concept

The "Payette River Interpretive Trail" concept provides for interpretation of the area in a manner that would be unique within Idaho, although the concept has already been successfully implemented in the Everglades. The proposed "river trail" is approximately 3.3 miles in length. At the rivers gentle

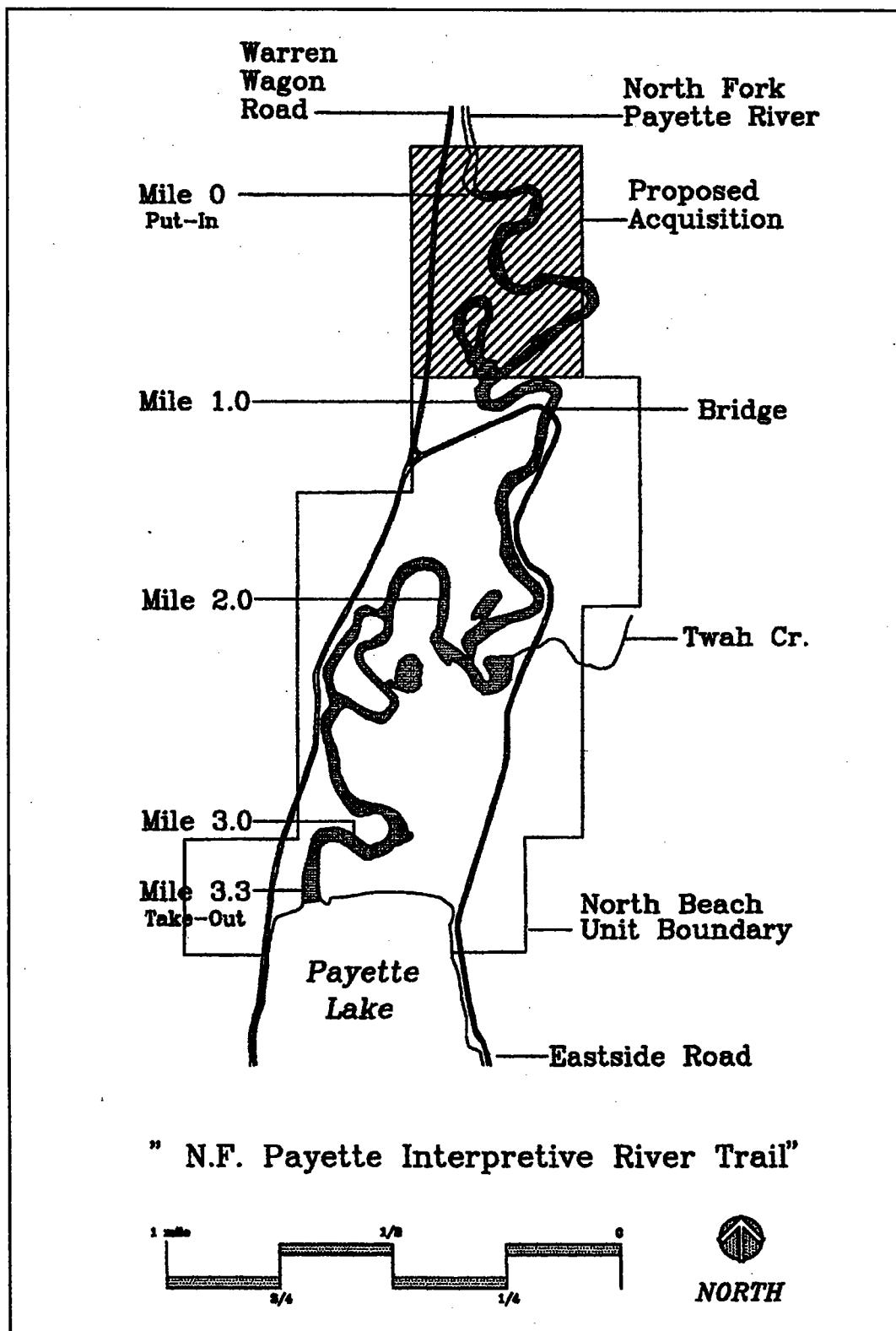
gradient of 3 f.p.m. (feet per mile), the course could be negotiated by even the novice canoeist. The trip from the proposed put-in site (currently located on Idaho Department of Lands property) would take approximately 2 hours at a leisurely pace. At periodic intervals along the "river trail", interpretive panels/displays and self-guided waterproof brochures would provide users with insight into riparian topics - wetland ecology, river inhabitants, and dynamic river processes. At the "Northwest Passage" interpretive site, canoeists would be provided an access point so that they could also enjoy the exhibit. This approach to interpretation of the wetland places the impact on the resource most able to withstand it - the river itself. This proposed "river-trail" is shown on map 6.1.

Implementation

The "river-trail" is intended for boat owners and non-owners alike. A canoe-rental service, however, should be an integral part of the operation. It



River trail Map 6.1



River trail Map 6.1

could be either I.D.P.R. or concessionaire managed. In either case, a shuttle service for canoes/canoeists would be required-possibly a secondary function of the kiosk attendant. Arriving "river trail" users would park their vehicle at the westside parking facility, and be shuttled 1.5 miles north on Warren Wagon Road to the proposed put-in site, where a trailer-full of canoes would be pre-positioned. Next, canoes, lifejackets, paddles, and literature would be distributed. The ideal scenario would space departures at 10-15 minute intervals so that each party could enjoy a "solitary" experience. Upon completion of the journey, participants would take-out at the west side parking area, and load their canoes on a second trailer - which, when full, would be shuttle back to the put-in point. The now-empty trailer at the put-in would be brought back to begin another cycle.

Summary

This proposal outlines a framework for a "one of a kind" Idaho interpretive experience oriented towards the short-term, destination resort visitor that may or may not have access to a canoe. "River-Trail" users could wake up, have a leisurely breakfast in McCall, drive to North Beach-have a memorable outing - and be back in McCall in time for lunch. Initially, visitor use would probably be low; However once word of its existence spread, the "river-trail" would quickly be added to the list of "things to do while in the McCall area".